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ABSTRACT

A study of the use of audiotape support for enhancing reading comprehension in nine Spanish-English bilingual fifth through seventh grade public school students used two treatments for each subject: reading silently and reading silently with the support of an audiotape version of the story. A comprehension test followed each story, with each student being asked four literal and four interpretive questions. The results indicate a significant difference between the treatments, suggesting that for bilingual students, auditorily supported reading is a more effective means of enhancing comprehension than silent reading alone. The greatest effect was on literal comprehension, although both aspects of comprehension were improved. One secondary result was students' more positive attitude toward participating in supplementary reading activities and their expressed desire for more cassette tapes wih books. Further research on the effect of tapes on vocabulary development and on the effect of repeated readings on bilingual children's fluency is suggested. (MSE)

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Reading Comprehension in Bilingual Students with the Aid of Taped Stories

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Running head: READING COMPREHENSION IN BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Abstract

Presents results of an experiment which tested the comprehension of bilingual children under two methods: (a) silent reading with taped auditory support versus (b) silent reading alone. The experiment used a repeated measures design, with each student individually receiving four stories, two with cassette tape and printed text and two with printed text alone. A comprehension test, with half literal and half interpretive questions, followed each story. An analysis of variance revealed a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the treatments, suggesting that, for bilingual students, auditory supported reading is a more effective means of comprehension than silent reading alone.

Reading Comprehension in Bilingual Students with the Aid of Taped Stories

Auditory supported reading, such as listening to a story being read while silently reading the printed text, has been proved effective as a means for improving fluency, vocabulary, and/or comprehension among a variety of student populations from first grade through the freshman year of college. Among the populations tested were normal and retarded black male readers at first, third, and fifth grade levels (Katz & Deutsch, 1964); culturally different remedial students in the upper elementary grades (Laffey, Kelly, & Perry, 1979); educationally disadvantaged third and fourth grade students in an inner city school (Schneeberg, 1977); nonreaders in the seventh through twelfth grades (Bliss, 1976); adolescent retarded readers (Bursuk, 1971); and two populations of college students (Rao, 1972; Gribbon, 1973).

The literature, however, has not revealed tests of auditory supported reading using bilingual subjects -- bilingual here defined as speaking both English and another language (Spanish) and coming from a home where the other language is spoken as a first language.

Some approaches to auditory supported reading include: (a) assisted reading, in which the auditory presentation occurs once prior to reading the text, employing echoic response. It may be used in a classroom setting or by parents helping to develop reading readiness by orally presenting a story word by word; (b) repeated reading, in which the student listens to a tape of a story as often as necessary to gain familiarity with the story and then reads without auditory support until fluency is achieved; (c) repeated listening while reading as often as necessary until fluency is achieved; and (d) supported listening while reading, whereby a taped story, or one read aloud

by the teacher, is presented once along with the printed text. The various modes have yielded increased motivation to read, which was recognized by Chomsky (1976) to be the result of students' experiencing success in reading, often for the first time. The success was generalizable to other books, and after mastering a number of books through assisted, repeated, or supported reading, students frequently went on to reading on their own.

The literature on bilingualism and reading indicates that there are potential reading problems specific to the bilingual student, including lack of necessary vocabulary, frequent difference in syntax from the language spoken at home, and certain sounds of English that may not appear in the other language (Harris & Smith, 1980). Further, the semantic structure of English presents problems for Spanish speakers (Saville, 1976). These differences may interfere with reading comprehension by causing the student to attend only to vocabulary and to decoding, encoding, and recoding from the first language. It was reasoned that auditory supported reading might be influential in minimizing or overcoming the specific reading problems associated with language differences by providing the bilingual reader with simultaneous auditory models of English vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, and correct phrasing. It was hoped that these models would assist the bilingual student in becoming a more fluent reader and in being able, therefore, to focus attentionally on comprehension more than on decoding, encoding, and recoding.

The purpose of this study was to test the possible differences of two methods: (a) silent reading with taped auditory support versus (b) silent reading without taped auditory support. It was hypothesized that the comprehension of bilingual children after using auditory supported reading would be higher than the comprehension using silent reading only.

Method

The experiment used a repeated measures design, with each student receiving four stories, two stories with cassette tape (recorded by the experimenter) and printed text and two stories with printed text alone. Both the assignment of stories to students and the order of stories were random. A comprehension test followed each story; each student was asked eight questions, half of them literal and half of them interpretive. The experimenter met individually with each student for about half an hour for each of two sessions. During each of the two meetings, two stories and two comprehension tests were given. According to the Fry Readability Graph, the stories selected fell within the fifth grade range.

The experimental instructions for the taped stories were as follows: "You will be reading a story while you are listening to a tape of it being read to you. There are some headphones for you to wear to listen to the story. After the story is over, I will ask you some questions about it. Do you understand? Let's put these headphones on you. Over here is the knob that adjusts the loudness of the sound. Touch it with your hand. Good. When the tape comes on, if it is too loud or too soft for you, adjust it with that knob so that it is just right for you. Be sure to follow the print on the pages with your eyes and read the story while you are listening. Do you have any questions about any of this? Alright, here is your story. It is called (name of story)." If the story was not taped, the instructions were as follows: "Here is a story called (name of story). Please read it to yourself and when you have finished, let me know. Then I will ask you some questions about it. Do you understand?"

The subjects were nine bilingual children attending fifth through seventh

grades in public schools in Chicago with an average reading comprehension grade equivalent of 4.2 (SD = 1.6) as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests. They came from homes where Spanish was spoken as a first language. They all attended an after-school reading tutorial program either because of referral by school personnel or because of their own desire to improve their reading skills or to participate in a peer activity.

Results

An analysis of variance was computed. Significant differences were found for treatment effects ($F = 9.60$, $df = 1,17$, $p < .01$), showing that the taped stories elicited a significantly higher mean comprehension score than the untaped. Out of a possible 16 points for each treatment, the mean for the taped stories was 10.38 (SD = 3.04), and the mean for the untaped stories was 7.05 (SD = 2.05). Additionally, since the experiment included equal numbers of literal and interpretive questions, means and standard deviations were computed. That comparison showed higher scores under the taped condition for both types of questions, with means of 5.6 (SD = 1.75) and 4.6 (SD = 1.52) respectively for literal and interpretive questions using auditory supported reading and 4.0 (SD = 1.65) and 3.5 (SD = 1.30) for silent reading alone. This indicates that while the greatest effect was on literal comprehension, both aspects of reading comprehension increased with listening/reading.

Discussion

The results of this experiment showed a significant difference between the treatments, suggesting that, for bilingual students, auditory supported reading is a more effective means of comprehension than silent reading alone.

Other experimenters have also found a positive relationship betweer auditory supported reading and comprehension. For example, Schneeberg (1977)

found that repeated listening/reading with monolingual children yielded the most significant gains in the comprehension, rather than the vocabulary, subtest of the California Achievement Test. Heckelman (1969), too, found that when using the neurological impress method of unison oral reading with students who were at least three years behind their actual grade placement and expectancy, the mean gain in reading comprehension was 1.9 grade levels in six weeks, as measured by the Gilmore Oral Reading Test. While Schneeberg's and Heckelman's experiments differed -- Schneeberg used cassette tapes for repeated listening/reading with subjects reading silently, and Heckelman used oral reading, introducing new material each time -- both used combinations of simultaneous visual-auditory input and both found significant results. The findings of the present study are in agreement that simultaneous listening/reading has a positive effect on reading comprehension.

In addition, since the present study included equal numbers of literal and interpretive questions, the findings indicated that while the greatest effect was on literal comprehension when using auditory supported reading, both aspects of reading comprehension increased with listening/reading.

Although vocabulary was not a measure in the present study, as it was in Schneeberg's, it seems likely that vocabulary gains would take place among bilingual students. For example, after all the stories and tests had been administered, one of the students commented that listening to the cassette helped her to read because "sometimes you see a word and you don't know it, but then you hear it and you know it."

One interesting observation concerning the experiment was its strongly positive effect on students' attitudes toward participating in supplementary reading activities and in their expressed desire for more cassette tapes and

books. In one striking example, a student who was initially resistant to participating in the experiment ("I don't want no stupid cassettes.")was the leader of a group of four children who, after all the tapes and questions were finished, asked if the experimenter would please play the tapes again.

The impact of listening/reading on the motivation of students in this experiment agrees with a similar impact in the experiments of Schneeberg (1977), Chomsky (1976), and Carbo (1978), who all found that students who had previously been disinterested in reading because of past failures were now enthusiastic and motivated readers who had begun to generalize the success of mastery achieved through listening-while-reading to reading books on their own. The particular significance of this finding for bilingual students lies in its rich potential for providing a means for reading in English that not only models correct phrasing and pronunciation but promotes increased comprehension and motivation. Other researchers finding positive changes in students' attitudes toward reading were Bliss (1976) and Laffey et al.(1979) who also noted positive changes in students' self-concepts.

Further research could be carried out using auditory supported reading with bilingual students to explore its impact on students' vocabulary and its effectiveness with small groups working together, rather than in individual treatment; additionally, repeated readings could be used with bilingual children to study increases in fluency.

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